

#### IV. Did Jesus Really Rise From the Dead?

Video: Did Jesus Rise From the Dead (William Lane Craig at Yale University, 2014)

Youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_NAOc6ctw1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NAOc6ctw1s)

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.  
—1 Corinthians 15:17

- (1) **There are four historical facts that are widely agreed upon by NT scholars and historians (both theists and non-theists alike) which must be explained by any adequate historical hypothesis:**
  - (i) **Jesus' burial by Joseph of Arimathea**
  - (ii) **The discovery of the empty tomb by women**
  - (iii) **Postmortem appearances of Jesus**
  - (iv) **The origin of the disciples' belief in his resurrection**
- (2) **The best explanation of these facts is the Resurrection Hypothesis: Jesus was raised from the dead by God.**
- (3) **Therefore, Jesus was raised from the dead by God.**

#### ***Support for (1)***

*(i) After his crucifixion Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb.*

1. Jesus' burial is attested in early, independent sources.

- (a) Jesus' burial is attested in the very old tradition which is quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, which is dated to within 6 years of Jesus' death:

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:  
That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,  
and that he was buried,  
and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,  
and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve.”

- (b) The burial story is part of very old source material used by Mark in writing his gospel, dated to within 7 years of Jesus' death.

2. Mark (along with the other three gospels) says that Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus' body in his family tomb. But as a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention.

3. No competing burial story exists.

*(ii) Jesus' tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers on the Sunday after the crucifixion.*

1. The empty tomb is attested to by multiple independent, early sources.
  - Mark's source ended with the empty tomb.

- Matthew and John have independent sources about the empty tomb.
- The empty tomb is mentioned in the sermons of Acts (2:29; 13:36).
- The empty tomb is implied by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:4.

2. These early sources say that the tomb was discovered to be empty by women. Given the status of women in first century Palestine, this would have been awkward and embarrassing for Christians. So if the story of the empty tomb was made up, it is unlikely that women would have been made to be the first to discover the empty tomb.

3. If the tomb was not empty, it is unlikely that anyone would have believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The Jewish authorities would have revealed Jesus' body and put an end to the Jesus movement.

4. The earliest Jewish polemic presupposes an empty tomb. Matt. 28:11-15 presents a widespread Jewish explanation of the resurrection: the disciples stole the body.

*(iii) Different individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead.*

1. Paul's list of eyewitnesses to the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:3-8 makes it very likely that such appearances occurred.

2. The appearance narratives in the gospels provide multiple independent attestation of the appearances.

- The appearance to Peter is attested to by Luke (24:34) and Paul (1 Cor. 15:5).
- The appearance to the Twelve is attested by Luke (24:36-43), John (20:19-20), and Paul (1 Cor. 15:5).
- The appearance to the women is attested by Matthew (28:9-10) and John (20:11-17).

3. James, one of Jesus' brothers, did not believe Jesus during his lifetime but became an active Christian after Jesus' death, eventually rising to leadership of the Jerusalem church. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, James was martyred for his faith in the AD 60s.

*(iv) The original disciples suddenly and sincerely came to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead despite their having every predisposition to the contrary.*

We have to remember that Jesus' followers were Jews. And as Jews they would have had the following beliefs:

- *Messiah.* The Messiah was a triumphant figure who would come, subdue Israel's enemies, command the respect of both Jew and Gentile, and establish the throne of David.
- *Resurrection.* The Pharisees believed that there would be a general bodily resurrection of the dead at the end of time. When you die you are in a holding pattern until that time, and then you have a new life. No one is resurrected before the general resurrection. The Sadducees didn't believe in life after death at all.

But despite every predisposition to the contrary, the original disciples believed in, and were willing to go to their deaths for, the fact of Jesus' bodily resurrection. What could have caused them to believe in such an un-Jewish and outlandish thing?

N. T. Wright says:

“[A]s a historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him.”

### ***Support for (2)***

*Alternative Hypotheses:*

- a. Conspiracy hypothesis
- b. Apparent death hypothesis
- c. Wrong tomb hypothesis
- d. Displaced body hypothesis
- e. Hallucination hypothesis

***a. Conspiracy Hypothesis:*** Jesus' disciples stole the body of Jesus and lied about his postmortem appearances, faking his resurrection.

***Problem 1:*** The story would have been told differently if it had been fabricated. E.g., The story wouldn't have had women be the ones to find the tomb empty.

***Problem 2:*** The disciples' seemed to sincerely believe that Jesus was risen from the dead. Indeed, they died for that belief. The transformation of their lives cannot be accounted for by the Conspiracy Hypothesis.

***Problem 3:*** It would be incredibly difficult to successfully pull off a conspiracy of this magnitude. As Charles Colson says:

“My personal experience in the Watergate scandal convinces me of the historic proof of the resurrection....I was charged with being part of the conspiracy to cover up the Watergate break-in. What most Watergate buffs have failed to note, however, is that the conspiracy succeeded for less than three weeks....Think of it: the most powerful men around the president of the United States could not keep a lie for three weeks. And you'd have me believe that the twelve apostles—powerless, persecuted, exiled, many martyred, their leader Peter crucified upside down—these common men gave their lives for a lie, without ever breathing a word to the contrary? Impossible...people will die for something they believe to be true; but men will never die for something they know to be false.” (Colson, *The Faith*, p. 93)

***Problem 4:*** The idea of stealing Jesus' body and saying that God raised it from the dead wouldn't have entered the minds of the disciples as first century Jews. (See N. T. Wright.)

***Problem 5:*** The Conspiracy Hypothesis is ad hoc. It attributes motives and ideas in the thinking of the earliest disciples for which there is no evidence whatsoever.

**b. Apparent Death Hypothesis:** Jesus was not completely dead when taken down from the cross. He revived in the tomb and escaped to convince his disciples he had risen from the dead.

**Problem 1:** The empty tomb. A man sealed inside a tomb could not move the stone to escape.

**Problem 2:** The postmortem appearances. The appearance of a half-dead man needing medical attention would not have made the disciples (or anyone else) think that he had risen from the dead, but rather, that he had not died (since the resurrection of the Messiah was contrary to Jewish thought).

**Problem 3:** Roman executioners were experts at ensuring death. Moreover, they ensured death by thrusting a spear into the victim's side, as was done to Jesus. Jesus never would have survived extensive torture, crucifixion, and entombment.

**c. Wrong Tomb Hypothesis:** The women lost their way on Sunday morning on the way to the tomb and happened upon an empty tomb with a caretaker who said something like, "You're looking for Jesus of Nazareth? He's not here."

**Problem 1:** The hypothesis says nothing about the postmortem appearances. So it will have to be combined with some hypothesis about those appearances.

**Problem 2:** The hypothesis is anachronistic. Such evidence would hardly have led a first-century Jew to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead—especially if this had been reported by women and could not be verified.

**Problem 3:** Jewish authorities could have easily debunked the claim that Jesus was risen from the dead by going to the correct tomb. Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus and could easily point to its location.

**d. Displaced Body Hypothesis:** Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus' body in his tomb temporarily, since it was so late and his family tomb was near. But then he moved the corpse to the criminal's graveyard. The disciples were unaware of this, and thereby erroneously inferred that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

**Problem 1:** The hypothesis says nothing about the postmortem appearances, and does not explain the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection (given their first-century Jewish context).

**Problem 2:** Since Joseph and his servants would have known where Jesus was buried, they could have easily corrected the disciples' mistake.

**Problem 3:** The earliest Jewish/Christian disputes were not over the location of Jesus' grave or the identity of the corpse, but why the tomb was empty. Had the body been misplaced, the Jewish polemic would have been quite different.

**Problem 4:** Jewish sources indicate that the criminals' graveyard was at most 600 yards from the site of Jesus' crucifixion. And Jewish practice was to bury executed criminals on the day of their

execution, and Jewish law did not permit a body to be moved later, except to a family tomb. Joseph could have easily placed Jesus in the criminals' graveyard, thereby avoiding defiling his own family tomb, and he would have wanted to do so given Jewish practice.

**e. Hallucination Hypothesis:** The resurrection appearances were merely hallucinations on the part of the disciples.

**Problem 1:** The hypothesis says nothing about the empty tomb. So it will have to be combined with some hypothesis about the empty tomb.

**Problem 2:** N. T. Wright points out that in the ancient world, visions of the deceased were not thought to be evidence that the person was living, but that he was dead. They knew all about hallucinations, and ghosts, and visions of people who had died. So the disciples would need good evidence for thinking that Jesus was really alive (and not merely a vision or apparition).

**Problem 3:** It's difficult to explain the diversity of such hallucinations, if that's what the postmortem appearances were. Jesus appeared many times, in many different places, to many different people and groups, and to believers as well as unbelievers.

### **General Objections**

**Objection 1:** It is always less plausible to believe in a miracle than in some other natural explanation. Miracles by their very nature are inherently improbable.

**Reply:** Beliefs are not probable or improbable in themselves. They are probable or improbable in relation to one's background evidence. If one's background evidence includes the belief that God exists, then miracles will not be improbable at all. And the three arguments we have considered earlier give us reason to think that God exists.

**Objection 2:** This argument only counts as evidence for the resurrection if you already think that the Bible is true. It depends on accepting the historical reliability of the gospels. But if we are skeptical about their reliability, then we no longer have good reason to believe in the resurrection.

**Reply:** It doesn't depend on assuming the historicity of the gospels. As was said above, these facts are widely accepted by NT scholars and historians regardless of whether they are Christians or not. What we do is we treat the documents just as we would any other documents from the first century. And when we do that, the NT documents looks very good as sources for the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The only reason they are privileged is because they are the earliest, most primitive, and fullest sources we have.

**Objection 3:** If we are going to study the life of Jesus scientifically, using the criteria of historical scholarship, we must assume methodological naturalism. Methodological naturalism is the idea that answers to questions are sought within nature only; the only data and hypotheses we should consider are those that are consistent with naturalism. So we shouldn't posit supernatural explanations, and we shouldn't conclude that Jesus actually rose from the dead.

**Reply:** It's fine for the historian to limit themselves to naturalistic explanations for methodological reasons. But the Christian doesn't need to do that. The question is which explanation of the data is the best, all things considered? Why can't I, as a rational person, draw the conclusion that the best explanation of the facts is the miraculous resurrection of Jesus?

## V. The Problem of Evil

If God is willing to prevent evil but not able, then he is not all-powerful.  
If he is able to prevent evil but not willing, then he is not good.  
If he is both willing and able, how can evil exist?  
If he is neither able nor willing, why call him God?  
—Epicurus (341-270 BC)

### A. The Logical Problem of Evil

*Video:* Suffering and Evil: The Logical Problem (reasonablefaith.org)

*Youtube:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k64YJYBUFLM>

- (1) It's logically impossible for God (an all-powerful and all-good being) and suffering to both exist.**
- (2) Suffering exists.**
- (3) Therefore, God does not exist.**

**Objection:** For the logical problem of evil to work, the atheist must show that it's *impossible* for God to have morally justifying reasons for allowing suffering. But how could anyone ever be in a position to show such a thing? It's not enough to show that it's *implausible* or *unlikely* for both God and suffering to exist. The atheist must show that it's *impossible*. If it's merely *possible* that God has good reasons for allowing suffering (even if we are entirely unaware of those reasons), then premise (1) is false.

Alvin Plantinga has offered one possible scenario in which God and suffering are compatible:

Perhaps it is better for there to be creatures with free will—creatures with the ability to make morally significant choices. And making morally significant choices requires the ability to do good as well as evil. This would mean that if God made creatures with free will, he couldn't force them freely choose what is good. That would be a logical impossibility—like making a circle that is square. And perhaps all the suffering in the world is the result of the free choices of these creatures.

That story doesn't have to be *plausible* for the logical problem of evil to fail. It just has to be *possible*. It is for this reason that philosophers almost universally agree that the logical problem of evil fails.

J. L. Mackie, a prominent atheist philosopher well known for formulating the logical problem of evil, concedes that, "the problem of evil does not, after all, show that the central doctrines of theism are logically inconsistent with one another."

Paul Draper (an agnostic philosopher in the philosophy department at Purdue) says:

"Logical arguments from evil are a dying (dead?) breed. For all we know, even an omnipotent and omniscient being might be forced to allow evil for the sake of obtaining some important good. Our knowledge of goods and evils and the logical relations they bear to each other is much too limited to prove that this could not be the case."

## **B. The Evidential Problem of Evil**

*Video:* Suffering and Evil: The Probability Version (reasonablefaith.org)

*Youtube:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxj8ag8Ntd4>

- (1) If God exists, then there are no instances of pointless evil.**
- (2) There are instances of pointless evil.**
- (3) Therefore, God does not exist.**

### ***Support for (1)***

Pointless evil is intense evil and suffering that God could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good. It seems quite plausible that a wholly good God would want to prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering he could without thereby losing some greater good. And an all-powerful God could prevent that suffering.

***Support for (2):*** We see no point served by many instances of suffering. And if we see no point, then there is no point.

### ***Objections***

***Objection 1:*** Why think that if there were a point to some instance of evil and suffering, we would see it? We're not in a position to say that God probably doesn't have good reasons for allowing suffering in the world. We are limited in time, and space, and intelligence. How could we know that it would be better if there were less suffering in the world? In order to achieve his purposes, God may have to allow a great deal of suffering.

***Objection 2:*** If we consider *only* the suffering in the world, then God's existence may be improbable. But if we step back and include all of our background information (which will include the powerful arguments we've already considered for the existence of an all-good creator of the universe), then the existence of God may not be improbable.

Indeed, many have thought that the existence of evil is actually evidence *for* the existence of God. It is difficult to see how there could be objective moral values and duties apart from God. Alvin Plantinga says,

“But could there really be any such thing as horrifying wickedness if [atheism] were true? I don't see how....There can be such a thing only if there is a way rational creatures are *supposed* to live....But [atheism] cannot make room for that...that requires a divine lawgiver, one whose very nature it is to abhor wickedness....Accordingly, if you think there really *is* such a thing as horrifying wickedness...then you have a powerful theistic argument from evil.” (*Philosophers Who Believe*, p. 73)

The theist who is confident that God exists might offer the following argument:

- (1) If God exists, then there are no instances of pointless evil.
- (4) God exists.
- (5) Therefore, there are no instances of pointless evil.



**Objection 3:** If Christianity is true, it is not at all unlikely that suffering and evil exist along with God. Consider the following Christian doctrines:

1. The chief purpose of human life is not happiness, but to know God—to be in relationship with God. Knowing God is an incomparable good. This alone brings fulfillment.

2. Human beings are in a state of rebellion against God and his purpose. Human evils show us man’s depravity, which is a consequence of his alienation from God. Suffering is one way that God draws people with free will to himself. As C. S. Lewis says:

“God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

3. Human beings are unceasing spiritual beings. We are not limited to this life; God’s purposes extend beyond the grave. For those of us who know God, our pain will not endure forever. The Apostle Paul (who endured hardship, beatings, imprisonment, being stoned and left for dead, shipwrecks) wrote in 2 Cor. 4:16-18:

“We do not lose heart...for this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to things that are seen, but to things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

4. Jesus’ life as a human being and his death shows us that God has an intimate knowledge of evil and pain and suffering. God is not some aloof being who watches us suffer from afar. He is a personal God, who took on human flesh, lived a human life, endured evil and pain and suffering—at the hands of his own creation!—and redeemed it. If the greatest evil the world has ever known can be redeemed, then whatever evils I suffer can certainly be redeemed, even if I don’t now understand how.

### ***Common Objections to the Christian Response to the Evidential Problem of Evil***

**Objection 1:** If we aren’t in a position to know whether God has good reasons for allowing the evil he does, how could we be in a position to know that God is good?

**Reply:** First, it is conceptually necessary that God is good. Goodness is just part of the concept of God. What we mean by *God* is *the greatest conceivable being*. And such a being must be morally perfect. To say that God is not good is like saying that a triangle doesn’t have three sides. Second, the Moral Argument shows us that such a being exists. For there to be objective goodness, there must be a standard or paradigm of goodness, and that is God.

**Objection 2:** If suffering is good, then it seems that we should not try to alleviate the suffering of other people.

**Reply:** This misunderstands the Christian view of suffering. Suffering is only conditionally good, not good in itself. It is good only insofar as it contributes to some other good (e.g., spiritual well-being).

**Objection 3:** Even if suffering is only conditionally good, it seems that we shouldn't try to help people who are suffering. After all, how can we know when suffering contributes to spiritual well-being and when it doesn't?

**Reply:** First, when someone is suffering as a result of human injustice, we have a clear obligation to do what is in our power to stop the suffering. In doing so, we help not only the victim, but also the person doing the injustice. Second, we can know that suffering is ordained by God for spiritual health when we try to alleviate the suffering and it's not possible for us to do so.

**Objection 4:** Think about a situation where the parent of a child has to allow that child to undergo suffering for the good of the child (e.g., chemotherapy for a child with cancer). A good parent would do all she could to assure her child of her love and that there is a purpose for the child's suffering, even if the child couldn't grasp it. If God was all good, God would do the same. So in cases where people suffer greatly and don't understand why, they should experience God's presence and assurance. But that doesn't happen. So the fact that God's presence and assurance are not more evident in these cases gives us evidence that God does not exist.

**Reply:** First, although we may not understand why God doesn't make himself more evident to people who are suffering, that doesn't mean that God doesn't have good reasons for not revealing himself. And we are simply not in a position to know that it would be better for God to make himself more apparent in those situations. Second, if we have good reason for believing that God exists, then we have good reason for believing that God has a good reason for not making himself more evident. Third, I suspect that God's reason for not making himself more evident has to do with his desire for human beings to be able to freely choose to accept or reject him. God's keeping himself at arms length, so to speak, gives human beings room for development and ultimately to freely receive or reject his saving grace. Moreover, it may be that if God were to reveal himself more forcefully in some circumstances, it would push people away. Fourth, Christians are not left alone in their suffering. The Holy Spirit dwells in believers, and brings consolation in suffering. God loves us and lives within us, even if we don't feel his presence.

## **VI. Conclusion: Why am I a Christian?**

1. I recognize the truth of Christianity through the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit.

2. There is really good evidence for believing that Christianity is true.

- The Cosmological Argument and the Fine-Tuning Argument show me that there is an uncaused immaterial being that intentionally created the universe.
- The moral argument shows me that this being is all good.
- The historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus shows me that Jesus bodily rose from the dead.
- We have only discussed four arguments, but there are many more. For example: Leibniz's Cosmological Argument, the Ontological Argument, the argument from the success of science, the argument from the reliability of our cognitive faculties, and so on.

3. Christianity does the best job of diagnosing and solving the human condition. There are several universal experiences and desires that Christianity does a far better job of accounting for than the alternatives:

- Human evil and our inability to adequately deal with it.
- Recognition that things are not the way they are supposed to be.
- Feelings of alienation from God, other people, and ourselves.
- Deep shame and guilt for violating the moral order.
- Desire for life after death.
- Desire for meaning and purpose.
- Desire to play an important part in the struggle between good and evil.

4. Christianity has Jesus. In all my reading I've never come across anyone quite like Jesus. The other religions want Jesus. They recognize him as a good moral teacher, or a great prophet, or someone who attained spiritual enlightenment. Well, if you want Jesus, why not go with the real thing? Why not go with the religion he started?